

Litter

Introduction

When you are getting ready to go to the beach in the morning, what do you pack? If you're like most people, you will bring towels, sunscreen, maybe an umbrella, and most likely food. Chances are, your food has packaging of some kind, whether it's plastic, paper, styrofoam, or cellophane. Do you remember to bring a garbage bag for all your trash?

No matter what beach you go to, you will likely see litter. Humans create litter every where they go. But it is especially disturbing to see litter on a beach, where so many people go to relax on a hot summer day. Unfortunately, trash is a problem at many of New Hampshire's beaches. To combat litter, regular citizens volunteer to help pick up litter at beaches. Data from clean ups events demonstrate the problem is not going away. The Beach Program is working on an outreach program to convince people to stop littering the beaches.

Trash is a problem

The water at New Hampshire's coastal beaches is generally clean. Each year, only one or two swimming advisories are issued along the coast. The Beach Program receives multiple complaints, however, of trash on the beaches and especially Hampton Beach. This past summer, an especially irate resident of Hampton left a five minute voice mail regarding the state of the beach during the sand castle competition. The resident was taking her small children to see the sand castles and was discouraged by the garbage greeting them when they arrived.

Hampton Beach State Park, like all state parks in New Hampshire, is a carry-in/carry-out beach. Whatever trash you bring with you must leave with you. At most state parks, including the southern portion of Hampton Beach, small trash bags are given to arriving visitors. Hampton Beach even has trash barrels along the Route 1A sidewalk, with one at every stairwell to the beach. These measures have not helped to reduce the amount of trash found on the beach.

In an effort to clean the beach, the state park administrators purchased a trash collecting machine. The machine is used early every morning to rake the sand and collect large trash items. Smaller items, like cigarette butts, straws, and food wrappers, are missed. Despite the use of the trash collector, Hampton Beach still remains coated in litter throughout much of the summer.

After several complaints about the litter problem on the beach, the Beach Program contacted the Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation. Blue Ocean (as the group is more commonly known) has administered an Adopt-a-Beach program at other area beaches for many years. An Adopt-a-

Beach program was established at Hampton Beach in 2005. Blue Ocean and the NH Department of Environmental Services now partner to locate volunteers and provide them with the supplies necessary to conduct beach cleanups at Hampton Beach.

Beach clean up participants collect more garbage each year

Unfortunately, the litter problem is not going away, and, in fact, seems to be getting worse. Blue Ocean volunteers track the types and amounts of trash collected during each clean up event at Hampton Beach. In 2005, volunteers collected 1,358 pounds of trash at Hampton Beach. The amount collected in 2006 was a record 2,117 pounds. In 2007, the total was slightly less at 1,950 pounds of trash. During 2007, volunteers also collected a total of 2,821 pounds of garbage from Fort Stark, Janness Beach, North Beach, the Sunken Forest area at Ordiorne Point, Wallis Sands, and Ragged Neck.

The Ocean Conservancy, another community organization, sponsors yearly beach clean up events along the coastline. The non-profit environmental organization holds an International Coastal Cleanup day every September. In 2005, 651 pounds of trash were collected during the Coastal Cleanup day at Hampton Beach and 458 pounds were collected in 2006. The amount collected September 15, 2007 was down to 351 pounds. The 2008 cleanup day is being organized for this coming September. Although the weight went down recently, more clean-up days are being organized and more volunteers are becoming involved.

Outreach program to address litter problems

Data collected from clean-up events show increased quantities of collected trash. Beach litter is not an isolated problem with only one solution. Many organizations, towns, and volunteers can work with various government agencies to make beaches a more pleasant and safe destination for everyone. More volunteers are needed to pick up the increasing trash volumes from New Hampshire's coastal beaches. More outreach is needed to remind beach goers that each person can help keep New Hampshire beaches clean. Programs and partnerships can be expanded to provide information, trash receptacles and recycling containers to reduce beach litter. With more outreach, education, and resources, change in the people's behavior at public beaches can become a reality.